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A Review of the Role of Facilitators in Community-Based, Design-Led Planning and Placemaking Events

HUSAM ALWAER and IAN COOPER

Critics have suggested that the style of those who facilitate community-based, design-led planning and placemaking events can be biased, over-powering, manipulative, and more concerned with the form of the built environment than with meeting wider community needs. Where this happens, outputs from design-led events may not deliver long-term outcomes that meet community and other stakeholders' aspirations. This article reviews the role of how facilitators are expected to operate. It sets out the opportunities and challenges of effective facilitation throughout key stages of community design processes. The literature reviewed demonstrates that high expectations are placed on facilitation, yet there are no standards for how facilitators should act nor any agreement on when their contributions might have best effect. This is significant in terms of building trust in collaborative planning processes and outcomes. The article draws together the set of skills and personal traits of facilitators, as identified in a large body of existing literature on community design processes. It brings these together to form a research agenda based on the questions raised or left unanswered, and reflections on how the facilitation of community-based, design-led interventions in the built environment might be improved.

Today planning policy-making is seen as constructed in a dynamic or fluid process, which needs to constantly adapt to interactions between 'people, place and capital flows' that might originate from anywhere in the world (Hill *et al.*, 2013, p. 16). Further, more collaborative, community processes have been called for, and are framed as a form of participatory democracy (Ermacora and Bullivant, 2016; Campion, 2018; Malone, 2018; Bouche-Florin, 2019) that can meet changing needs and expectations, and help building trust in governance. However, in the current body of literature on community design processes there is evidence of a gap between the policy rhetoric and the realities of participation as put into practice (Rudqvist and Woodford-Berger, 1996; Lasker and Weiss,

2003; Norton, 2007; Laurian and Shaw, 2009, Aitkin, 2010; Conrad, 2010). As a result, there have been increasing efforts by policy-makers to define elements of 'good practice', in order to ensure that the involvement of the public produces real and tangible benefits (Conrad, 2010).

This paper offers a new, extensive and detailed examination of the existing literature, and adds an original take on 'delivering good practice'. It reviews the existing work and draws out the expectations of facilitation, the roles that facilitators are expected to fulfil, and the skills they are expected to put into practice. Collaborative community processes in planning and placemaking are held up as being capable of capturing the 'authentic' expression of the aspirations and concerns

of the stakeholders who take part (AlWaer *et al.*, 2017). Yet, despite the existence of considerable literature on what constitutes 'good' public participation (Wates, 2014), there is evidence to suggest that the practice of community involvement often does not match up to the policy rhetoric and so produces a 'democratic deficit' (Conrad, 2010; Kovalev *et al.*, 2009, p. 1). In practice, there is a spectrum of collaborative activities. They range from those arranged by stakeholders (whether private or public sector) as a cursory means of obtaining comments from residents. Such poor practice seeks only to tick boxes or 'engineer' consent to get planning permission or agreement on the principles of a local plan, which produces processes that are top-down or one-way. These are token forms of engagement, as Arnstein highlighted 50 years ago (Arnstein, 1969). At the other end of the scale, there are projects that are set up and co-designed by social enterprises in more 'bottom up' ways. There are also more imaginative events, often citizen-led initiatives, that seek local community ideas, comments and information (Emacroa and Bullivant, 2016).

Design-led planning and placemaking events often involve members of the community working alongside local authorities and developers to co-create visually planned, agreed action plan and strategies (Campion, 2018). Nevertheless concerns have been expressed (Wates, 2014; Campion, 2018; Malone, 2018) about the level of skills required to support effective facilitation in community participation, and the need to take ethical responsibility for including and serving communities. Promoting engagement from the outset is important not only in terms of including individuals and groups, but also in encouraging them to feel valued (Wates, 2014). Facilitation can be required to support stakeholder engagement at various points in the process of designing the built environment. Stakeholder engagement is increasingly expected from built environment professionals (AlWaer and Illsley, 2017). But community design processes are full of complexities

(Innes and Booher, 2018), since the uncertainties surrounding decision-making and 'social problems' are compounded by the multiplicity of stakeholder views. The resulting complexity is therefore understood as socially constructed rather than merely a product of complicated processes.

The literature is contradictory about the extent to which the composition of the facilitation team has an influence on the success or failure of an event (Wates, 2014; AlWaer, *et al.*, 2017). And there are gaps in the literature which become apparent when considering the importance placed on the roles of the different actors in the processes, particularly those of 'the facilitator'. Handbooks tend to provide relatively vague guidance and some even state specifically that they are not intended to be used as a facilitation guide (Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006). Due to the complexity of the contending forces (described below), there is no single paradigm around which to organize thought and action in this arena. Instead there are competing viewpoints about how best to deliver community-based, design-led events and, indeed, about how much priority should be given to them. The level of complexity and disagreement highlights the need for a more coherent approach to community-led planning and design. This needs to offer explicit articulation of the different phases of developing and delivering 'design interventions', accompanied by clear specifications of the contributing roles and responsibilities of those involved at each phase.

This article calls for greater clarity about the ways facilitators are expected to operate. It articulates the opportunities and problems that confront effective facilitation throughout what the literature presents as the key stages of community design processes. The review of built environment literature that is presented here centres on: the roles identified for professionals, and particularly professional facilitators; the need for these actors to be trusted and non-partisan advocates of an 'better future'; and the challenges of conflicting

demands on professionals that result from complexity and disagreement. It identifies the practical tasks related to processes (structures and planning stages), the personal attributes (work related) that might also be needed when seeking to engage with communities; and the technical skills that facilitators require to run successful community design-led events. In the next section, we briefly set out our approach to literature search and analysis. The following sections present the results by theme, covering the stages of design interventions, responsibilities and roles of facilitators. The concluding section then pulls together the findings from the review into a future research agenda.

Literature Search and Analysis

The literature included in this review includes academic, policy and practice publications. The underlying aim was to begin a re-conceptualization of the role of facilitators in community-based, design-led events in order to offer an analytic framework for more systematic enquiry. Instead of imposing pre-ordained theories, conceptual frameworks, or analytical categories, reference points were generated directly by identifying the key issues raised by academics in their publications.

The review work began with a qualitative content analysis of recent academic literature to identify the issues currently presented as a challenge to facilitation and the role of the facilitators in community-based, design-led events. The content analysis followed the guidelines offered by Kitchenham (2004, p. 1), which offer an established procedure for conducting systematic reviews. The review thus sought to: provide a framework that can appropriately position new research activities; identify any gaps in current research so as to suggest areas for further investigation; and summarize the existing evidence concerning a facilitation process or facilitator skills.

The approach to identify publications borrowed the inclusion criteria of Den Haan

and Van der Voort (2018). We found three related types of literature. Firstly, there was a somewhat diffuse set concerned with built environment professionals and the changing context of their practice. A second set of works explained the purpose, structure and staging of community design events. The third set was more specifically focused on facilitators and facilitation processes. This approach helped in separating out the large number of confounding factors that often obscure academic discussion of facilitation.

In total, sixty-six articles were identified through an iterative search. Firstly, searches of online database were for multiple terms for the concepts of 'community-based design-led events', 'understanding facilitation' and 'the role of facilitators and the built environment professionals.' The terms were applied to 'title/abstract/keyword' searches for Web of Science, Google Scholar, Scopus, Proquest, ACM digital library and Sciencedirect. Publications not expressly covering the scope of the literature review were then ruled out. Subsequent exploration of the references in the remaining articles revealed additional papers that were pertinent to 'requirements for successful community design-led events' and were included in the review.

The literature gathered was qualitatively reviewed, with line by line content analysis. Extracts from the publications reviewed were initially collated under the themes of 'structure and staging of community design processes and stakeholder responsibilities', 'built environment professionals' roles', 'facilitation in collaborative design-led events' and 'facilitator's skills, practical tasks and personal attributes'. The categories were not necessarily discrete given the high degree of complexity involved in community design-led events, the diversity of actions that can be pursued, and the different political, social and cultural contexts in which this form of planning process is undertaken (Campion, 2018; Malone, 2018; Campbell, 2018). The issues identified provide the structure for the following sections, which set out the argument

being made for improving professional practice.

Purpose and Form of Community Design Events

The term 'community design-led events' is used here within the field of urban planning to refer to a process, which has multiple stages. The literature reviewed highlights the differences between a traditional planning workshop and a community-based, design-led event by placing emphasis on what is described as the latter's highly collaborative and intensive nature (Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006; Walters, 2007; Condon, 2008; Healey, 2010; Roggema, 2014) and employment of iterative feedback loops involving the use of design (Steiner and Butler, 2012). Condon (2008) and Campion (2018) highlighted the use of 'design as informed dialogue' along with a need to ensure participants engage with it, with a focus on producing visual outputs (Walters, 2007; Condon, 2008; Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006; Campion, 2018).

Participatory community design-led events (previously called co-operative design and now more frequently referred to as co-design)

is delivered through events known, in planning circles, under a range of different titles such 'charrettes', 'participatory placemaking', and 'enquiry by design'. According to Wates (2014) and Campion (2018) charrettes are the most common type of community-based design-led events in Western countries, and defined as 'an interactive, open dialogue and design process in which the public, local professionals and stakeholders work collaboratively to co-create/co-design a shared vision/roadmap or agree action plans for the future' (Campion, 2018). Such community design events are described as taking a hands-on approach, with having stated goals that allow for 'iterative feedback', which is deemed essential for gaining stakeholder understanding and support. Elsewhere it is stated that the focus should be on the involvement of a variety of stakeholders, with the citizens dominating the design process (Healey, 2003; 2010; Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006).

A distinction should be made between design-led events as one-off or stand-alone occurrences and those seen as part of on-going conversations with communities and relevant stakeholders. The latter would be more productive in helping to show progress, to

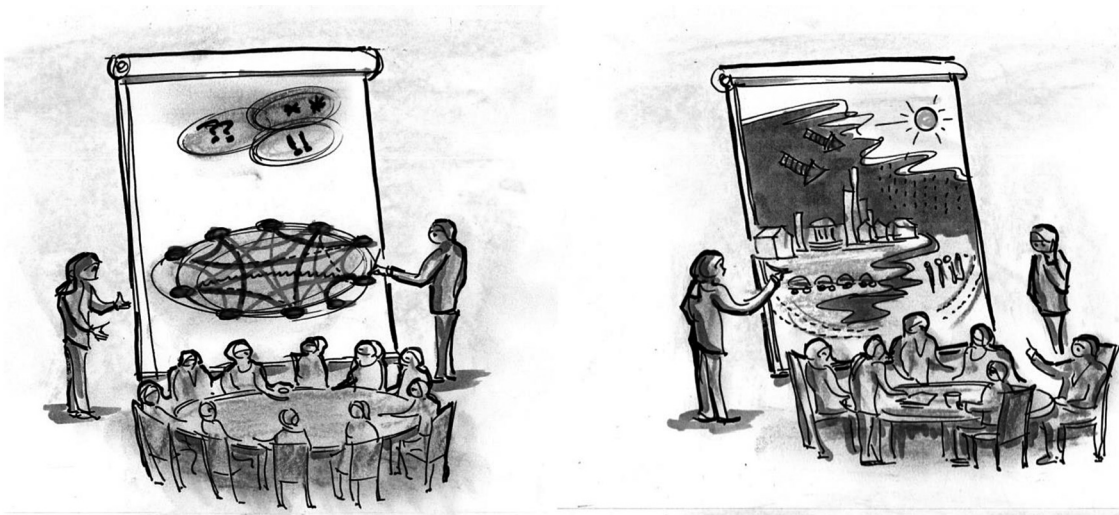


Figure 1. Working collaboratively can help stakeholders share concerns, develop a common understanding of issues and move towards creative solutions. (Source: Joe Ravetz)

explain and implement decision-making, and demonstrate that stakeholders' contributions are making a difference. In the literature reviewed, this distinction is not observed. Instead, for instance, charrettes are frequently described (see below) as being a design process, rather than as particular stage within a larger, on-going planning process. Here the notion of 'co-production', commonly associated with charrettes, is of particular concern. This term has been borrowed from the field of public services policy (Petrescu *et al.*, 2016, p. 719) to describe a transformation of decision-making through the involvement of users in design and delivery of services (Boyle and Harris, 2009; Stevenson and Petrescu, 2016; Paskaleva and Cooper, 2017).

As described in the literature, details of the techniques of community design events and their outcomes will vary, and they depend on the context, purpose and sponsors involved. Sponsors are typically private developers, public agencies, land owners or non-governmental agencies (Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006). There are examples of organizers and facilitators of design-led events being blamed for operating within a framework that favours the sponsor's interests (particularly those of

private developers or local authorities) over those of local communities (Ermacora and Bullivant, 2016). Such critics advocate an honest and mutually empowering relationship with locals and 'end users', through ongoing dialogue to augment the relevance of interventions (*ibid.*, p. 76). In evaluating outcomes of community design events, emphasis is placed on the techniques and tools employed, and on the quality of implementation (Beveridge *et al.*, 2016; Campion, 2018). Tools and techniques should be used in order to build the necessary trust and understanding before any design interventions are carried out (Ermacora and Bullivant, 2016).

Communicative Processes, Responsibilities and the Role of Facilitators

Even after a half-century after Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969) set out the power structures inherent in techniques, current methods of community involvement are still seen as paying little more than lip service in conventional, plan-making practices (Heywood, 2011). For instance, Ermacora and Bullivant (2016) note the tendency for most conventional consultation processes to go

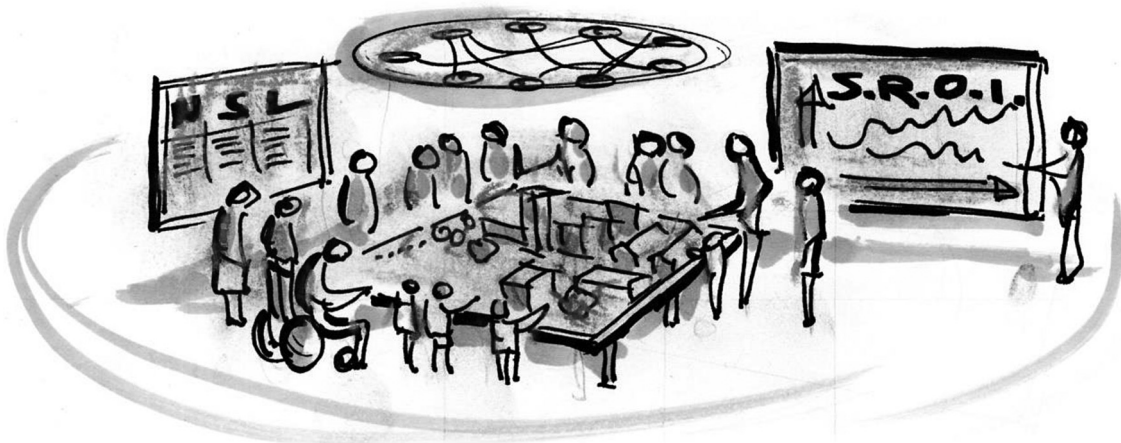


Figure 2. Participatory community design events involve 'mutual dialogue', working collaboratively towards designing future solutions, and taking joint action to achieve positive change. (Source: Joe Ravetz)

out to the public and consult only after most of the critical decisions have already been made. Where this happens local stakeholders may view the process as limited, pointless, disingenuous, and this can lead to an enduring legacy of distrust. New Urbanism's collaborative design-led approaches face particularly strong criticism (White, 2015), where according to Grant:

the rhetoric of local control encounters the reality of slick graphics, romantic water colours, and celebrity designers... Although the participants may see local concerns in the outcomes, an outside observer may also read professional values in the plans... With the wide media interest in photogenic new urbanist communities, we cannot easily separate fashion fad, consumer preferences, expert opinion, and democratic choice. (Grant, 2006, pp.183–184, cited in White, 2015, p. 336)

As a result, there have been increasing efforts by policy-makers to promote good facilitation practice as a means of improving the outcomes of public involvement (Conrad, 2010), but here too there are concerns. As Grant (2006) noted it is not always clear that facilitator and facilitation team can effectively 'accommodate diversity' and the processes employed may exclude a community's less mainstream voices. Further, Bond and Thompson-Fawcett, 2007 (cited in White, 2015, p. 336) noted deeper and conflict-ridden local design issues, such as social mix, urban density or future greenfield housing targets, may not get the time and attention they deserve.

The criticisms suggest narrow engagement but they also resonate with a wider debate amongst built environment professionals (Bordass and Leaman, 2013), about the nature of the relationship between professional facilitators and communities in the face of global flows capital investments that place conflicting demands on facilitators. This debate is focused on: '... whether professional facilitators need to have a stronger role in protecting the public good – through leadership, acting impartially, and sharing knowledge and expertise' (*ibid.*) The quality

of professionalism is said to be eroded by short-termism, bureaucracy and the outsourcing of technical skills, for instance by the UK government. For built environment professionals to have integrity, their role must be as 'non-partisan advocate' of better built environmental professional facilitators, and visibly so. Hill *et al.* (2013) contend that the responsibility of the 'future professional', including the 'future professional facilitator', should be to manage fluidity involved in the co-production processes by being held accountable by all the stakeholders.

An inclusive approach to community design processes is seen as a critical factor in success. All who may be impacted upon by the outcome of the process have to be given opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes (Illsley and Walters, 2017; Campion, 2018). According to Illsley and Walters (2017) all stakeholders need to be empowered to make decisions that can determine and alter the pattern of future developments. The literature suggests that decisions will need to be embedded, through the facilitation activities in the community planning process, which can help to make connections between *structural* elements such as governance capacity or resources and *actions* or the design decisions for a specific place, people and location. This is said to avoid individual acts of development that are uncoordinated and hence fail to cohere in an area or create benefits for a whole place (AlWaer, 2014; AlWaer, et al., 2014; AlWaer and Kirk, 2016; AlWaer and Illsley, 2017). To avoid such under-performance, Campbell (2018) and Janda and Parag (2013) both suggest that communication must not be 'one way', whether top-down or bottom-up, but an interactive process. One-way communication typically involves informing, consulting and advising (e.g. by regulation and guidance) while two-way communication involves open dialogue. Nonetheless, the argument is still made for top-down systems on the basis that may be needed to enable bottom-up systems (Campbell, 2018, p. 72).

The direct of communication is a real concern for facilitators who sit 'in the middle' of communicative processes (Deakin and Allwinkle, 2007; Deakin, 2009; Bordass and Leaman, 2013). If the role of those in the middle is not considered in the community design process, or if facilitators are not properly involved, motivated, and trained, then performance suffers (Bordass and Leaman, 2013). Influence from the middle can be upwards (towards regulators and policy-makers) and downwards (towards the community and the end user). The multi-disciplinary of facilitation team involved in community design processes is seen as being well-placed to help synthesize such local, context-aware (bottom-up) thinking with national and regional (top-down) 'planning' guidance, legislation and regulation (Rogers and Leach, 2014). In the literature reviewed here, involving people in design is presented as going beyond making minor modification to plans and co-optation, and extends to equal and fair access to collaborative activities. Thus the expectation of the facilitator appears to be that they will help to minimize possible communicative distortions and accommodate difference, and be trained in critical thinking for that purpose (Kenned, 2003 in Arefi, 2014, p. 18; White, 2015; Campbell, 2018).

The Role of Facilitators

There are a number of definitions offered in the literature for a facilitator and all hark back to the Latin root of enabling or making something easy. Heron pointed to a facilitator as 'a person who has the role of empowering participants to learn in an experiential group' (1999, p. 1). Bens (2012) went further, stating that a facilitator is seen as a person who assists a group of people to understand their common objectives and helps them to work towards achieving them. For Schwarz, the role of the facilitator was 'helping the group improve its process in a manner consistent with the core values' (2002).

Elsewhere, the key characteristic of a facilitator

was that of neutrality within the context of exchanges. For instance, Kaner *et al.* (2007, p. xv) depicted a facilitator as an individual who enables groups to work more effectively so as to 'collaborate and achieve synergy'. He held that they should be 'content-neutral' by not taking sides or advocating a particular point of view during a process.

The idea of doing things differently, by 'enabling' has been a common theme for some time. This is not about facilitators themselves being creative but about them creating a 'context' in which everyone can be creative (Cruickshank, 2014, p. 130). As Ellis and Henderson's new Charter for Planners states, facilitators:

should have a central role in mediating and challenging how power operates in decisions ... to break down those professional barriers between planning and people so that planning is creative, a straightforward tool for building the future of communities. (Ellis and Henderson, 2014, p. 95)

Facilitation of participatory design-led events is often seen as a team effort, involving a lead facilitator and sub-facilitators during active participatory group work. The primary concern of a 'facilitation team' is the smooth operations of participation. Different engagement tools might be used, to 'promote meaningful participation, such as generating mutual understanding, inclusive solutions and cultivating shared responsibility' (Kaner, 2007 *et al.*). Members of the Facilitation Team may be built environment professionals with expertise in facilitation, professional facilitators with no built environment expertise, or built environment professionals with little or no expertise or experience of facilitation (AlWaer *et al.*, 2017).

The nature of the facilitation that participants encounter at community design events can vary considerably, and the quality of the experience is believed to depend on the facilitators' skills in 'participatory community decision-making' (Kaner *et al.*, 2007) or level of training in collaborative planning (Campion, 2018). Kaner *et al.* (2007) argue that more

Table 1. Participatory versus conventional community decision-making. (Source: Kaner *et al.*, 2007, p. 18)

<i>Participatory</i>	<i>Conventional</i>
Everyone participates, not just a few.	Some speakers get more air time.
Opposing views are allowed to co-exist.	Differences of opinion are treated as conflict.
People are encouraged to stand up for their beliefs.	People with minority perspectives are discouraged from speaking out.
Each member speaks up on matters of controversy. Everyone knows where everyone stands.	Some members remain quiet on controversial matters. No one really knows where everyone stands.
A problem is not considered solved until everyone who will be affected by the solution understands the reasoning.	A problem is considered solved as soon as the fastest thinkers have reached an answer. Everyone else is then expected to 'get on board' regardless of whether s/he understands the logic of the decision.
When an agreement is made, it is assumed the decision reflects a wide range of perspectives.	When an agreement is made, it is assumed that they are all thinking the exact same thing.

participatory groups exhibit a set of shared norms. The key differences between participatory and more conventional types of group are shown in table 1.

Kaner *et al.* (2007) argue that participatory decision-making will emerge more easily where a facilitator helps a group move beyond familiar or 'conventional' patterns. In particular a facilitator will encourage open discussion from the start, including points of contention, to allow individuals and groups to be included and feel valued (Cruickshank, 2014). It is important not to let experts or one particular interest group dominate facilitated events, and instead allow local participants

time to develop capability and work towards points of agreement (Wates, 2014; Condon 2008, Kaner, *et al.*, 2007; Cameron, 2005; Campion, 2018).

There is an assumption in the literature that stakeholders taking part in collaborative planning must come into some form of inclusive 'group'. According to Schwarz, 'the facilitator's role is to help the group improve its process in a manner consistent with core values' (2002, p. 49). These core values, associated with conventional and more collaborative decision-making, are shown in table 2.

It is important to be cautious about the

Table 2. Core values for group participation. (Source: after Schwarz, 2002)

	<i>Core Values</i>
Valid Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People share all relevant information • Info shared so that others understand their reasoning • Info is shared so that others can validate it • New info determines if past decisions should be changed
Free and Informed Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People define their own objectives • Choices are not coerced or manipulated • Choices are based on valid info
Internal Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People own their decisions • Commitment is intrinsic, not reward or punishment
Compassion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily suspend judgment • Concerned for others' and own good • Appreciate others' and their own suffering

significance of these 'core values' and the idea of group formation in design events. These values are derived from the particular political world view of Western notions of participatory democracy but are not universally shared even within current democratic governance contexts. Moreover, the presumed existence of such core values implies that the role of the facilitators avoids drawing attention to other positions. Conversely, facilitators can also be seen as helping to bring ideas out into the open in order to enable a group to listen to each other, to further all participants' knowledge and thus their ability to make decisions (Cameron, 2005). Such arguments would suggest that the role of the facilitator is a 'balancing act', poised between remaining 'impartial' and providing enough guidance to be able enable participants in decision-making.

Thus, facilitation seeks balance by leaning in many directions: leading and responding to context; applying techniques and making space for others to learn; encouraging collaboration and allowing diversity to emerge. This as explained by Cruickshank (2014, p. 133) as two broad approaches: the first is based around 'structures and planning'; and the other is more reliant on 'improvisation and is closer to performance and theatre'. There may be trade-offs between highly prepared events and the flexibility of improvisation, and any specific activities somewhere on a spectrum between the two. Facilitators can be polished improvisers or they may rely on a set of tools. Participants too may be more or less responsive, or they may prefer a structured form of interaction (*ibid.*). Thus, Cruickshank advises that the facilitator might need design tools and techniques that allow flexibility, so that participants won't have to follow blindly (*ibid.*).

We turn now to consider in more detail what might be deemed the tasks, personal attributes and technical skills that are needed in the facilitation of community design-led events.

Practical Tasks

Much of the literature (Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006; Condon, 2008; Conrad, 2010; Wates, 2014; Ermacora and Bullivant, 2016; Campion, 2018; Malone, 2018) suggests that those who facilitate community-based, design-led events need to address five key dimensions. These dimensions are not linear or universal. Rather they are cyclical in nature, involving a collection of processes and strategies that make up a multiplicity of activities and entry points (after Ermacora and Bullivant, 2016). Facilitators are expected to: engage with the full scope of the intentions; provide representation and address inequalities; understand the stages in community design processes; create a comfortable and convenient environment for participants; and influence the outcomes. As discussed here, these five dimensions have implications for the practical tasks of the facilitator.

Dimension 1: Full Scope of Rationale for Involving the Public

The purpose of engagement at any proposed community-design event must be made explicit from the outset of facilitation work, and as it will have a bearing on the practical tasks. This is critical as the activities and tools chosen need to support collaborative decision-making and be relevant to pursuing desired outcomes, which also avoids raising false expectations (RTPI, 2005). Promoting 'dialogue on purposes' for all stakeholders involved in a local context, is thus seen as a key and a distinct task of 'action research' to better understand local issues and challenges (Ermacora and Bullivant, 2016, p. 71). Such inclusive dialogue is also seen as a matter of 'building trust' so that eventually ideas can be put forward with confidence and collectively developed, which helps 'build momentum' (Ermacora and Bullivant, 2016). Here the facilitators must be cautious and try to avoid 'consultation fatigue', where the same people are repeatedly being approached



Figure 3. Community design-led events are likely to be undermined if the purpose of the engagement is not clearly explained from the very beginning. (Source: Nick Wright)

and thus become weary or lose trust in the engagement process (Aitken, 2010). Similarly, the tools used by a facilitator must have a specific purpose that is clear to participants, and not conflict with or distract from the objectives of engagement (Conrad, 2010, p. 47).

As Condon (2008) emphasized, the overarching purpose of any community design-led event is that citizens remain the most dominant part of events, despite the presence of multiple experts. Therefore, events should aim to make citizens part of the design team and everyone should be considered a designer, including those without official design training (Cordon, 2008). However, organizing and managing participatory design is very complicated and is seen as requiring a wide variety of expertise, skills and experience to do it well (yellow book ltd *et al.*, 2017). The format of an event should be properly designed, ensuring all parties will be able to feel they can understand the process being employed and contribute to it effectively (Condon, 2008).

Dimension 2: Representation and Addressing Inequalities

This dimension is about the extent to which

public involvement in the process is inclusive and represents all those affected. It is commonly maintained that those involved in community design processes should be broadly representative of the 'affected population', including both the professional and non-professional participants (Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Mascarenhas and Scarce, 2004; Conrad, 2010; Ermacora and Bullivant, 2016; Campion, 2018). To achieve this, there is a need *early on* in the processes to put efforts into a robust 'stakeholder analysis' (Campion, 2018; Wates, 2014; Roggema, 2014; Condon, 2008). This should identify who needs to be involved: from start to finish of the whole process (including the facilitation team and lead facilitator (charrette manager); in specific design events; in the review of progress; and in looking forwards to the post-event stages including implementation of the design.

Those involved in the process, whether members of the design team or the stakeholder management, need to clearly understand their role and contribution. Different sorts of skills may need to be pooled through collaboration, dependent on context. Therefore it is important to have a precise definition of the scope and type of engagement required, as well as the facilitator's role. Those

participating, across groups of professionals, politicians, local residents, schools and communities, need to have equal opportunity to get involved and must all be engaged meaningfully (Steiner and Butler, 2012; Campion, 2018). As Ermacora and Bullivant (2016, p. 77) pointed out, the value of the community design processes may be directly correlated to the 'spread of inputs'. There is a risk that only the loudest voices speak, which would result in a skewed or even wholly unrepresentative of group interests. The argument is therefore that successful community design processes must build 'capacity' and strengthen local relationships, in addition to uncovering local issues. Such techniques are particularly important in engaging effectively with groups that are 'seldom heard', 'hard to reach' or 'marginalized'.

It is seen as particularly important for facilitators to demonstrate how the tools and techniques they plan to use will support the ongoing engagement of groups and individuals who may be excluded or at a social disadvantage. The groups at particular risk of exclusion include children and young people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, minority faith groups, people with physical disabilities or mental health problems,

and gypsy or traveller communities (yellow book ltd, 2017). In addition people may face barriers to participation, particularly across areas of deprivation, and areas affected by poverty or people living in remote locations (Policy Link, 2012; Malone, 2018). People living in particularly challenging circumstances, such as the homeless or young carers, also need to be included (yellow book ltd, 2017). Thus, facilitation processes are expected to help to tackle inequalities and combat disadvantage.

Dimension 3: Understanding Stages in Community Design

The extent to which the public is involved at different points in the community designed events and process is a matter of some debate and there are practical implications for the work of the facilitator. The literature reviewed suggests that no two design-led events are ever the same (Condon, 2008; Wates, 2014; Campion, 2018), and therefore each set of processes should be designed in a bespoke way. By contrast, Lennertz and Lutzenhiser (2006) point out three clearly important stages, as shown in figure 5 for the charrette example. These are related to specific practical tasks of information

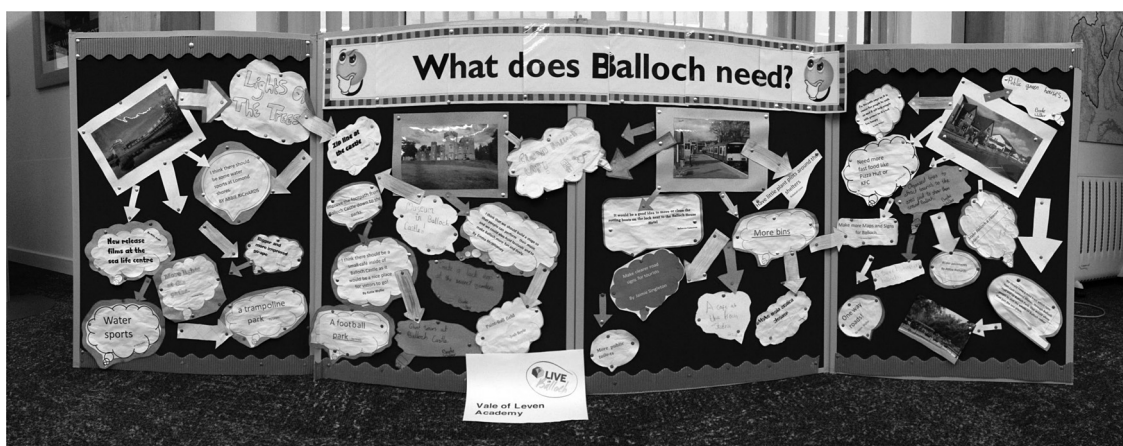


Figure 4. Tools should help participants think about their environments and the future and offer a means to structuring ideas. (Source: Kevin Murray Associates, JTP, and Nick Wright)



Figure 5. Three Phases of a collaborative planning process in which a community-based design-led event is embedded. (Source: National Charrette Institute)

gathering (pre-event), intensive face-to-face collaboration (design-led event/s), and implementation of outcomes and follow up (post-event).

In the design event itself, the underlying and guiding intention is said to be ‘co-production’ as far as this is possible, with the local community and other stakeholders involved (Roggema, 2014; Campion, 2018; Malone, 2018). This step is deemed to be essential to the facilitators and relies on a ‘holding environment’ where a web of relationships with stakeholders groups is secured, and ideally people are in active partnership with agreed sharing of resources and decision-making responsibilities (Roggema, 2014). Therefore, local stakeholders would be accepted and treated as being ‘integral to place development and as partners in the processes of co-creation, co-ownership and co-evolution of plans and proposals rather than mere users or clients of services’ (Du Plessis, 2012, p. 15). As discussed in the following sections, there is a wealth of considerations of this stage, but it is notable that the pre- and post-event stages are seen as essential to achieving these goals (McGlynn and Murrain, 1994; Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006).

The pre-event stage is seen as particularly important for preparation (Steiner and Butler, 2012), including finding the correct meeting place, materials and staff (Condon, 2008). In addition, tasks at the pre-event stage include publicizing the event to make it as inclusive as possible with widely circulated advance notification, determining who should be participating in addition to the wider public (e.g. policy experts and

specialists). Community outreach activities might be undertaken, e.g. for local schools (Campion, 2018). There may be opportunities for outreach through outdoor activities, or social gathering (Ermacora and Bullivant, 2016), which may help connect to the community or group members through emotional intelligence rather than a generic ‘informational approach’ (*ibid.*).

There is also the view (Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006; Wates, 2014) that participants should be involved early on in the processes because there is more potential at that point to influence the brief, scope, and methods used for any eventual design intervention. If the public is involved only in the later stages they may only provide feedback on a process that is already largely complete, and attempts to gain ‘buy-in’ to a pre-perceived project or vision will fail. In such cases, community design processes are likely to be seen as lacking genuineness and legitimacy, leading to disillusion and even growing distrust (Aitken, 2010).

The literature also stresses the importance of the post-event stage (Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006; Condon, 2008; Roggema, 2014). Holding a post-event session is signposted as being good to demonstrate progression and explanation of decision-making, and to demonstrate that participants’ contributions have made a difference (Condon, 2008; Roggema, 2014; Campion, 2018). The aim here is to transfer ownership of the process to the community so that it appears legitimate to those who have taken part. This is about building capacity and putting in place a governance structure in partnership with a



Figure 6. The three stages in community design processes. (Source: Husam AlWaer)

local community, so that they can take forward some of the identified steps themselves (Illsley and Walters, 2017; Campion, 2018; Campbell, 2018).

Interestingly, there are few signposts as to what the post-event stage entails. Campion (2018) recommends that continuing participation might involve community forums, engagement in the production of planning documents and planning applications, or membership of the delivery vehicle such as town teams or community trusts. In practice this will depend in part upon the purpose of each individual event. Yet, there is little guidance even as to the basic steps of the implementation and resulting effects of design-led events.

Dimension 4: Creating a Comfortable and Convenient Environment

The facilitators must render the processes comfortable and convenient for the public, but no set of rules is offered about the activity required, the scope of engagement,

or methods for this. Instead, the types of involvement should accommodate immediate responses and intuitive reactions that are connected to people's concerns (Ermacora and Bullivant, 2016). Facilitation helps in identifying such concerns, with community organizations, planners and policy-makers (yellow book ltd, 2017), setting out how to take forward possible actions that might arise from event(s), and considering associated challenges (AlWaer *et al.*, 2017).

Dimension 5: Influencing Outcomes of Design Interventions

Ultimately, influence is the measure participation and the way that community-based design processes shape the outcomes of design interventions for communities, such as quality of life, will be the test of success. Whilst influence may be manifest in several ways, important considerations noted (Condon, 2008; Roggema, 2014; AlWaer and Illsley, 2017; Campion, 2018; Malone, 2018; Campbell, 2018) are: the extent to which the public's



Figure 7. Different tools and techniques can be used to support small group discussions. (Source: Husam AlWaer)



Figure 8. Communities contribute 'expert' lay knowledge about places and are 'owners' or 'stewards' of the eventual outcomes. (Source: Kevin Murray Associates)

contribution will influence the decision-making process; the extent of transparency concerning the incorporation of public views in decision-making as represented in final outputs; and the effectiveness of the process achieved over the short, medium and long term. Thus it is important to consider 'hang-over' effects of expectations, where community members may be left confused as to how their participation 'follows through' into the next stage (AlWaer and Illsley, 2017). This is critical as they will be the eventual owners of the outcomes.

Personal Attributes and Technical Skills Required for Facilitation

Critiques of collaborative place-making focus on poor facilitation skills that fuel controversy and conflict (Campion, 2018, p. 10). For some time, the literature on community-based design-led processes (Cameron, 2005; Kaner *et al.*, 2007; Condon 2008; Wates, 2014; White, 2015; Illsley and Walters, 2017; Cooper and AlWaer, 2017; Campion, 2018) have drawn attention to three areas. Firstly, facilitators may have a poor 'style', which may be biased, over-powering, manipulative, or not concerned with meeting community needs. Secondly, there is often an over-dependence on facilitators with 'subject specific' knowledge. Thirdly, there may be a low focus on process-based facilitation skills, particularly the 'social competencies' needed for process management and stakeholder engagement.

The common thread of these critiques is a perception of a skills shortage, and the need to mature the competencies of professional facilitators rather than acquire specific new technical skills (AlWaer *et al.*, 2017). This point is reminiscent of similar challenges in other professional built environment domains. For instance, in the UK, the Egan Review reflected on the skills needed for the delivery of the Government's Sustainable Communities strategy and identified a world of missing skills. It recommended the intro-

duction of a set of generic skills via formal training courses for a range of professions (ODPM, 2004, p. 13), which led to the establishment of the Academy for Sustainable Communities. That report concluded (*ibid.*, p. 58) that, 'There is broad agreement in other studies that it is the generic rather than technical skills that are in short supply'.

The lessons for facilitation are that self-reflection is needed in order to integrate multiple perspectives and different sources of knowledge, while considering who is affected by and who might influence decision-making (Jacobs *et al.*, 2005; Reed *et al.*, 2009). The skill set identified in the literature can be seen as an elaboration of the 'managing stakeholders', 'conflict resolution' and 'communication'. Some of these skills might be formally taught, for example techniques for mediation, leadership, authority, or consensus building. Yet others are personal attributes, for example empathy and humility. Therefore, the competences facilitators need, as explained by Cruickshank (2014), can be categorized into two main categories: personality traits that only develop through self-reflection based on practical experience of engagement; and tools and techniques that are taught and developed further through practical experience, for example in being responsive to different contexts.

While not exhaustive, the literature reviewed identified nineteen distinct skills which would improve facilitators' performance (see Hogan, 2003; Lennertz and Lutzenhiser, 2006; Kaner *et al.*, 2007; Condon, 2008; RIBA, 2011; Policy Link, 2012; Bens, 2012; Wates, 2014; Cruickshank, 2014; Rodger, 2016; AlWaer *et al.*, 2017; Malone, 2018; Campion, 2018; Campbell, 2018). These are shown in table 3 under the categories of personal attributes, and learned skills, although some personal attributes may be honed to help in acquiring particular skills. For design events, one further skill is needed, the ability to communicate visually with through drawings and graphics. It is important to ensure good visual and graphic representations of design groups' ideas.

Table 3. Personal qualities and skills required for facilitation.*Personality Traits*

Open-minded: Supportive of different agendas and views. Participants will want to be involved in the community design event for a variety of reasons. Diversity of perspectives can assist in developing novel or innovative design interventions. Facilitators must accommodate different, often competing agendas and views, in an open and inclusive manner.

Approachable: Welcoming and respectful of the perceptions, choices and abilities of all participants. When a facilitator is open and friendly participants respond. People feel they can talk in open manner and are more likely give valuable feedback.

Honest, open and trustworthy: Straightforward about the nature of any activity during the event. This is part of managing expectations, both avoiding raising unrealistic aspirations and clarifying what might be achieved. People will participate more enthusiastically if they know that something can realistically be achieved.

Courteous and humble: Good conduct before, during or after charrettes and the capacity for 'silence'. Where the participants are engaged, a facilitator should remain silent and ensure nobody is disrupting or being left out.

Impartial stance: Portrays a neutral attitude. A facilitator is compromised where there is potential for manipulating an apparent viewpoint.

Empathetic: Able to sense and understand the feelings and concerns of others. This helps facilitators to identify effective means of developing contributions.

Learned Skills

Flexible working: Capable of modifying an event's structure and activities as circumstances dictate and avoiding inflexible methods and strategies. Applied to help in moving towards common objectives, as agreed during the pre-event preparation.

Competence in continuous improvement: Reflecting and working to improve practice by combining knowledge, skills and behaviours. Competency grows through experience.

Empowering: Involving all affected parties as early as possible. Seeking to identify participants' need in terms of perspectives, and abilities to participate effectively.

Self-aware: Self-reflection during the running of an event. Recognizing feelings and impact on discharging their role.

Organized: Gives sufficient time and effort to preliminary stages to ensure the smooth running of the event.

Consensus building: Supporting all participants so as to search for inclusive solutions.

Mediating: Presenting participants with the pros and cons of the positions being disputed, leaving participants to make their own decisions about them. It is not a facilitator's role to choose between or promote one side or another.

Communicating clearly: Carefully expressing themselves and giving instructions or advice that are unambiguous. Such communications can be given to participants in written form.

Listening attentively: Listening carefully to what participants are saying, not letting pre-conceptions cloud their understanding, and giving careful attention to what isn't being said and, where necessary, reading between the lines about what is. This is also known as 'active listening'.

Challenging assumptions: Working to recognise and unpack meanings in a manner that respect the integrity of those who hold them to avoid alienation and work through any conflict.

Seeking inclusive solutions: Balancing impartial inclusivity and experience-based advice. Decisions made from a diversity of inputs are more likely to be sustained by stakeholders. Signalling where experience suggests that a proposed course of action is unrealistic or likely to result in failure. Applying judgement and being transparent if offering advice.

Inclusive/fair: Creating a safe space where 'truth can be spoken to power', and where professionals' expertise and lay people's lived experience are both treated as valid. It is essential to give all participants an equal voice, regardless of power, status, education, social capital.

Ethical and respectful of confidentiality: Acting within moral codes and in accordance with accepted rules. Confidentiality restricts the facilitator from further and unauthorised dissemination of information.

Facilitators must work for balanced reporting back of design groups ideas by ensuring all points are represented visually.

Drawing on Shulman, the scope of facilitation skills encompasses ‘moral vision, theoretical understanding, practical skills, the centrality of judgment, learning from experience and the development of responsible professional communities’ (Shulman, 1998, p. 525). These skills might be needed more widely amongst built environment professional. As Barton (2017, p. 240) explains, while planners are not in position to ‘determine’ the future of neighbourhoods, towns and cities, they are inevitably part of the debate about the future between competing interests in society. Thus, even where planning appears primarily as a bureaucratic function, it will still shape the complex relationships between citizens, the private sector and the public sector.

As Healey (1997) has long since argued, a planner is a kind of ‘knowledge mediator and broker’, a critical friend and enabler of co-operative decision-making. Fainstein (2010, p. 23) elaborated on this, arguing that the real problems which people experience in the built environment arise from unjust distribution of key resources such housing or access to key facilities and schools, even intergenerationally, efor example through changes to future climates. Seen from this perspective, the role of a ‘competent facilitator’ from any profession (Kaner *et al.*, 2007)

is to help participants move across ways of thinking. Thus facilitators need conceptual and practical understanding of the values behind outcomes, and the skills to empower others to express their own points of view while working to narrow differences and move toward decisions. As shown in figure 9, Kaner argues that this is a combination of ‘divergent and convergent’ ways of thinking (Kaner *et al.*, 2007).

Conclusions

Each design intervention in the built environment has its own particular context and circumstances. As a consequence, there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to the role and effectiveness of facilitators in community-focused events (AlWaer *et al.*, 2017). What works with one community and project may not be appropriate for a similar community or similar type of project elsewhere (Malone, 2018). Nor should community engagement processes be regarded a magic cure-all, especially as they are part of a domain where decision-making is often contentious. What is demonstrated by the literature review presented in this article, is that effective facilitation of community-based design-led processes is expected to help to create a more consensual environment for such decision-making. There is also a level of agreement that creative and intelligent facilitation is critical to collaborative community planning

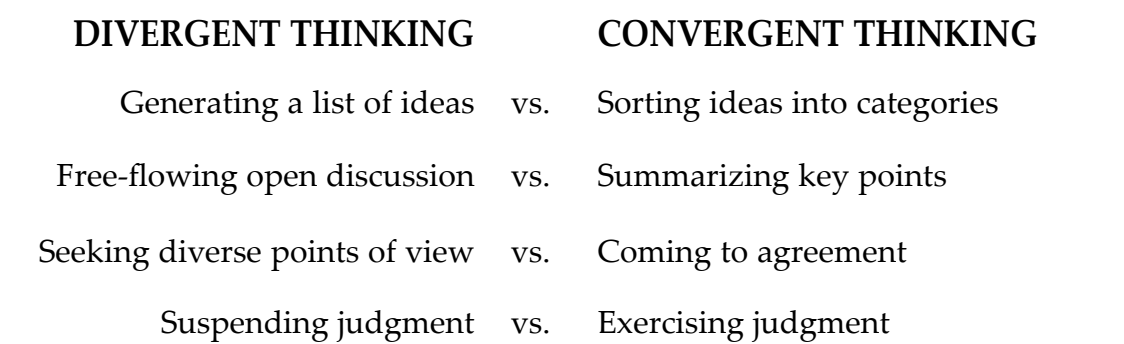


Figure 9. Divergent and convergent ways of thinking. (Source: Kaner *et al.*, 2007, p. 6.)

as a whole. In addition, there is a very particular and demanding set of personal attributes and skills that facilitators need in order to work effectively.

A call for greater clarity in the way facilitators operate recurs throughout the review. However, while critics request more clarity (see particularly Illsley and Walters, 2017; Bond and Thomson-Fawcett, 2007; Cameron, 2005; Peel, 2000), they do not specify how this might be provided. The call for built environment professionals, aided by facilitators, to embrace lay stakeholders in design processes is writ large in works from practice. Yet there is no clear or consistent guidance on how, or even when, facilitators should make their contributions to be most effective in helping to doing so. Nor is there empirically-grounded research about what does and does not work in practice.

In response we offer a questioning framework around which future research efforts on facilitation might cohere. Eight guiding questions are distilled from the tensions, contradictions and gaps identified in our review:

1. Should facilitators be content-free process managers? Or do they need to be built environment domain experts?
2. Can the skill set required by facilitators be taught through formal professional education? Can the personal attributes for effective facilitation be enhanced by acting as a self-reflective practitioner?
3. Should facilitators seek to provide an ideology-free 'safe space' at design-led events in which participants can freely explore their own aspirations and concerns? Or should they be empowering participants to confront the real-world political and economic constraints that will impinge on their freedom of decision-making outside the event?
4. Should the contribution of facilitators be restricted solely to design-led events such as

charrettes? Or should their contribution be made throughout the community planning process?

5. How should pre-event activities be fed into and inform design-led events?
6. How should deliberations, including any decisions reached, feed forward from design-led events into subsequent post-event decision-making activities?
7. How might participants in facilitated design-led events be convinced that their time and effort is worth investing?
8. How can the impact of outcomes from design-led events be tracked during the follow-on stages of collaborative community planning?

Facilitators must ensure that there is integration across professional disciplines, and that the different stages of design processes are synergistic. They must help in building trust and common purpose between team members and local stakeholders from a wide range of backgrounds and constituencies. The aim is to engender a deeper, collective understanding of the places where interventions are planned through developing dialogue and deliberative decision-making. This goal expands what is expected of facilitators today (Cooper and AlWaer, 2017; Peel, 2000), as the role might help reduce the tensions and conflicts associated with the planning system. This raises the significance of any new guidance on to how to improve facilitation, as it could also be beneficial to the wider planning profession and communities. It also requires softer interpersonal, people-management, skills that enable facilitators to reach out and draw others into decision-making in a comfortable and productive way, empathizing with the collaborators' viewpoints and circumstances.

It is striking that facilitators, and the built environment profession more widely,

are being expressly asked to act 'ethically' by encouraging and supporting collective decision-making practices through managing community co-design and co-production and delivery of services. They are being called upon to move beyond their comfort zones embrace their own civic responsibility and to encourage others to do likewise. 'New thinking' that is purposeful, visionary and committed to the improvement of processes, will require continual learning.

This review of the literature may help to structure thinking, with key questions that help to confront underlying assumptions, break down barriers between participants, and encourage reflective practice. Given the complexity of processes, more work will be needed to better understand and improve facilitation and professional roles in community-based design-led processes. Therefore, we conclude with seven questions that form an agenda for research and practice in collaborative planning:

1. How can the results of community design-led events be more effectively linked to post-event stages?
2. What transitional support can enable community stakeholders to take ownership of the later stages of community design processes?
3. How can pre- and post-event activities, on which the efficacy of community design-led events clearly depend, be more robust and better supported?
4. How might we clarify the level of substantive planning and design expertise a facilitator requires at any given community design event?
5. How might facilitators acquire and mature the skill set necessary for supporting design-led events?
6. How can the 'soft' skills required for

facilitating design-led activities be brought into the training of professionals, including that of architects and planners?

7. How might these skills be recognized, and is there a role for formal facilitation qualifications?

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